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DICKENS'
CHRISTMAS
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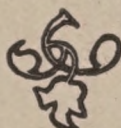
"WHY, IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO CARRY THAT TO CAMDEM TOWN" SAID SCROOGE. [PAGE 45.]

THE
RAINY DAY SERIES

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

By CHARLES DICKENS

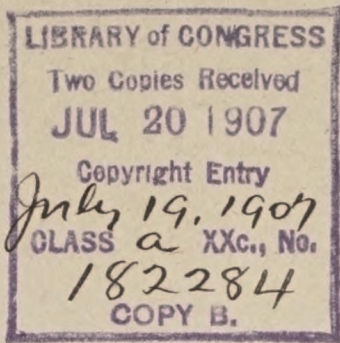
REWRITTEN FOR YOUNG READERS BY
MARGARET WATERS



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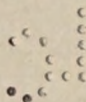


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ILLUSTRATIONS.

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A CHRISTMAS CAROL

STAVE ONE.

MARLEY'S GHOST.

Marley was dead. There is no doubt whatever about that. The register of his burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, the undertaker, and the chief mourner. Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail.

Scrooge knew he was dead? Of course he did. Scrooge and he were partners for I don't know how many years. Scrooge was his sole executor, his sole administrator, his sole assign, his sole residuary legatee, his sole friend and sole mourner.

Scrooge never painted out Old Marley's name. There it stood, years afterwards, above the warehouse door: Scrooge and Marley. Sometimes people new to the business called Scrooge Scrooge and sometimes Marley, but he answered to both names: it was all the same to him.

Oh! But he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone. Scrooge! Hard and sharp as flint, from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire. The cold within him froze his old features, nipped his pointed nose, shriveled his cheek, stiffened his gait, made his eyes red, his thin lips blue and spoke out shrewdly in his grating voice. A frosty rime was on his head, on his eyebrows, and his wiry chin. He iced his office in the dog-days; and didn't thaw it one degree at Christmas.

No warmth could warm, nor wintry weather chill him.

Nobody ever stopped him in the street to say, with gladsome looks, "My dear Scrooge, how are you? When will you come to see me?" No beggars implored him to bestow a trifle, no children asked him the way to such and such a place, no man or woman once in all his life inquired the time of day, of Scrooge.

Even the blind men's dogs appeared to know him; and when they saw him coming on, would tug their owners into doorways and up courts; and then would wag their tails as though they said, "No eye at all is better than an evil eye, dark master!"

But what did Scrooge care? It was the very thing he liked.

Once upon a time—of all the good days in the year, on Christmas Eve—old Scrooge sat busy in his counting-house. It was cold, bleak, biting weather: foggy withal: and he could hear the people in the court outside go wheezing up and down, beating their hands upon their breasts, and stamping their feet upon the pavement stones to warm them. The city clocks had only just gone three, but it was quite dark already: and candles were flaring in the windows of the neighboring offices.

The door of Scrooge's counting-house was open that he might keep his eye upon his clerk, who in a dismal little cell beyond was copying letters. Scrooge had a very small fire, but the clerk's fire was so very much smaller that it looked like one coal. But he couldn't replenish it, for Scrooge kept the coal-box in his own room; and so surely as the clerk came in with the shovel, the master predicted that it would be necessary for them to part. Wherefore the clerk put on his white comforter and tried to warm himself at the candle; in which effort, not being a man of strong imagination, he failed.

"A merry Christmas, uncle! God save you!" It was the voice of Scrooge's nephew, who came upon

him so quickly that this was the first intimation he had of his approach.

"Bah!" said Scrooge. "Humbug!"

"Christmas a humbug, uncle?" said Scrooge's nephew. "You don't mean that, I am sure."

"I do," said Scrooge. "Merry Christmas! What right have you to be merry? You're poor enough."

"Come, then," returned the nephew gaily. "What right have you to be dismal? You're rich enough."

Scrooge, having no better answer ready said, "Bah!" again.

"Uncle!" pleaded the nephew.

"Nephew!" returned the uncle sternly, "keep Christmas in your own way, and let me keep it in mine."

"Keep it!" repeated Scrooge's nephew. "But you don't keep it."

"Let me leave it alone, then," said Scrooge.

"There are many things from which I might have derived good by which I have not profited, I dare say," returned the nephew; "Christmas among the rest. And, uncle, though it has never put a scrap of gold or silver in my pocket, I believe that it has done me good, and will do me good; and I say, 'God bless it!'"

The clerk involuntarily applauded; becoming immediately sensible of the impropriety, he poked the fire, and extinguished the last frail spark forever.

"Let me hear another sound from you," said Scrooge, "and you'll keep your Christmas by losing your situation."

"Don't be angry, uncle. Come! Dine with us to-morrow."

"Why did you get married?" said Scrooge.

"Because I fell in love."

"Because you fell in love!" growled Scrooge, as if that were the only one thing in the world more ridiculous than a merry Christmas. "Good afternoon!"

"Nay, uncle, you never came to see me before that

happened. Why give it as a reason for not coming now?"

"Good afternoon," said Scrooge.

"I want nothing from you; I ask nothing of you; why cannot we be friends?"

"Good afternoon," said Scrooge.

"We have never had any quarrel, to which I have been a party. But I have made the trial in homage to Christmas, and I'll keep my Christmas humor to the last. So, a Merry Christmas, uncle!"

"Good afternoon," said Scrooge.

"And a Happy New Year!"

"Good afternoon," said Scrooge.

His nephew left the room without an angry word.

The clerk, in letting Scrooge's nephew out, had let two other people in.

"Scrooge and Marley's, I believe," said one of the gentlemen, referring to his list. "Have I the pleasure of addressing Mr. Scrooge or Mr. Marley?"

"Mr. Marley has been dead these seven years," Scrooge replied.

"We have no doubt his liberality is well represented by his surviving partner," said the gentleman, presenting his credentials.

At the ominous word "liberality" Scrooge frowned and handed the credentials back.

"At this festive season of the year, Mr. Scrooge," said the gentleman, taking up a pen, "it is more than usually desirable that we should make some slight provision for the poor and destitute, who suffer greatly at the present time.

"Are there no prisons?" asked Scrooge.

"Plenty of prisons," said the gentleman, laying down the pen.

"And the Union workhouses?" demanded Scrooge.

"Are they still in operation?"

"They are. Still," returned the gentleman.

"The treadmill and the Poor Law are in full vigor, then?"

"Both very busy, sir."

"Oh! I was afraid that something had occurred to stop them in their useful course," said Scrooge.

"Under the impression that they scarcely furnish Christian cheer of mind or body to the multitude," returned the gentleman, "a few of us are endeavoring to raise a fund to buy the poor some meat and drink, and means of warmth. What shall I put you down for?"

"Nothing!" Scrooge replied.

"You wish to be anonymous?"

"I wish to be left alone," said Scrooge. "Since you ask me what I wish, gentlemen, that is my answer. I don't make merry myself at Christmas, and I can't afford to make idle people merry."

Seeing clearly that it would be useless to pursue their point, the gentlemen withdrew.

The hour of shutting up the counting-house arrived. With an ill-will Scrooge dismounted from his stool, and tacitly admitted the fact to the expectant clerk in the Tank, who instantly snuffed his candle out, and put on his hat.

"You'll want all day tomorrow, I suppose?" said Scrooge.

"If quite convenient, Sir."

"It's not convenient," said Scrooge, "and it's not fair. If I was to stop half-a-crown for it, you'd think yourself ill-used, I'll be bound?"

The clerk smiled faintly.

"And yet," said Scrooge, "you don't think me ill-used, when I pay a day's wages for no work."

The clerk observed this was only once a year.

"A poor excuse for picking a man's pocket every twenty-fifth of December!" said Scrooge, buttoning his great-coat to the chin. "But I suppose you must have the whole day. Be here all the earlier next morning."

Scrooge took his melancholy dinner in his usual melancholy tavern; and having read all the newspapers, and beguiled the rest of the evening with his banker's-book, went home to bed. He lived in chambers that once belonged to his deceased partner.

The house was old enough now, and dreary enough, for nobody lived in it but Scrooge, the other rooms being all let out as offices. The yard was so dark that even Scrooge, who knew its every stone, was fain to grope with his hands.

Now, it is a fact, that there was nothing at all particular about the knocker on the door, except that it was very large. And then let any man explain to me, if he can, how it happened that Scrooge, having his key in the lock of the door, saw in the knocker, without its undergoing any intermediate process of change; not a knocker, but Marley's face.

As Scrooge looked fixedly at this phenomenon, it was a knocker again. He put his hand upon the key he had relinquished, turned it sturdily, walked in, and lighted his candle.

He paused before he shut the door; and looked cautiously behind it first, as if he half-expected to be terrified with the sight of Marley's pigtail sticking out into the hall. But there was nothing on the back of the door, except the screws and nuts that held the knocker on, so he said, "Pooh, pooh!" and closed it with a bang which resounded through the house like thunder.

Before Scrooge shut his own heavy door, he walked through his rooms to see that all was right. He had just enough recollection of the face to desire to do that.

Nobody under the table, nobody under the sofa; a small fire in the grate; spoon and basin ready; and the little saucepan of gruel upon the hob.

Quite satisfied, he closed his door, and locked himself in. Thus secured against surprise, he took off his



"IT'S NOT CONVENIENT" SAID SCROOGE, "AND IT'S NOT FAIR."
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cravat; put on his dressing-gown and slippers, and his night-cap, and sat down before the fire to take his gruel.

It was a very low fire indeed; nothing on such a bitter night. He was obliged to sit close to it, and brood over it, before he could extract the least sensation of warmth from such a handful of fuel. If each smooth tile in the fireplace had been a blank at first with power to shape some picture on its surface from the disjointed fragments of his thoughts, there would have been a copy of old Marley's head on every one.

"Humbug!" said Scrooge; and walked across the room.

After several turns, he sat down again. As he threw his head back in the chair, his glance happened to rest upon a disused bell, that hung in the room. It was with great dread, that as he looked, he saw this bell begin to swing. It swung softly in the outset but soon rang out loudly, and so did every bell in the house.

This might have lasted half a minute, but it seemed an hour. The bells ceased as they had begun, together. They were succeeded by a clanking noise, deep down below, as if some person were dragging a heavy chain over the casks in the wine-merchant's cellar.

The cellar-door flew open with a booming sound, and then he heard the noise much louder, on the floors below; then, coming up the stairs, came straight towards his door.

"It's humbug still!" said Scrooge. "I won't believe it."

His color changed, though, when without a pause it came on through the heavy door, and passed into the room before his eyes. Upon its coming in, the dying flame leaped up, as though it cried, "I know him! Marley's Ghost!" and fell again.

The same face. Marley in his pigtail, usual waistcoat, tights and boots. The chain he drew was clasped

about his middle. It was long, and wound about him like a tail, and it was made of cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds and heavy purses wrought in steel. His body was transparent; so that Scrooge, observing him, and looking through his waistcoat, could see the two buttons on his coat behind.

"What do you want with me?" said Scrooge, cold as ever.

"Much!"—Marley's voice, no doubt about it.

"Who are you?"

"Ask me who I was."

"Who were you, then?" said Scrooge, raising his voice.

"In life I was your partner, Jacob Marley."

"Can you—can you sit down?" asked Scrooge, looking doubtfully at him.

"I can."

"Do it then."

The Ghost sat down on the opposite side of the fireplace, as if he were quite used to it.

"You don't believe in me," observed the Ghost.

"I don't know," said Scrooge.

"What evidence would you have of my reality beyond that of your senses?"

"I don't know," said Scrooge.

"Why do you doubt your senses?"

"Because," said Scrooge, "a little thing affects them. There's more of gravy than of grave about you, whatever you are!"

"You see this toothpick?" said Scrooge.

"I do," replied the Ghost.

"You are not looking at it," said Scrooge.

"But I see it," said the Ghost, "notwithstanding."

"Well!" returned Scrooge. "I have but to swallow this, and be for the rest of my days persecuted by a legion of goblins, all of my own creation. Humbug, I tell you—humbug!"

At this the spirit raised a frightful cry, and shook its chain with such a dismal and appalling noise, that Scrooge held on tight to his chair to save himself from falling in a swoon. The phantom took off the bandage round its head, as if it were too warm to wear indoors, and its lower jaw dropped down upon its breast.

"Mercy!" said Scrooge. "Dreadful apparition, why do you trouble me?"

"Man of the worldly mind!" replied the Ghost, "do you believe in me or not?"

"I do," said Scrooge. "I must. But why do spirits walk the earth and why do they come to me?"

"It is required of every man," the Ghost returned, "that the spirit with him should walk abroad among his fellow-men, and travel far and wide, and if that spirit goes not forth in life, it is condemned to do so after death. It is doomed to wander through the world—oh, woe is me!"

"You are fettered," said Scrooge, trembling. "Tell me why?"

"I wear the chain I forged in life," replied the Ghost. "I made it link by link, and I girded it on of my own free will, and of my own free will I wore it."

"Or would you know," pursued the Ghost, "the weight and length of the strong coil you bear yourself? It was full as heavy and as long as this, seven Christmas Eve's ago.

Scrooge glanced about him on the floor, in the expectation of finding himself surrounded by some fifty or sixty fathoms of iron cable; but he could see nothing.

"Jacob," he said, imploringly. "Old Jacob Marley, tell me more."

"I have none to give," the Ghost replied. "Nor can I tell you what I would. I cannot rest, I cannot stay, I cannot linger anywhere. My spirit never walked beyond our counting-house—mark me!—in life my spirit never roved beyond the narrow limits of our money-changing hole."

"You must have been very slow about it, Jacob," Scrooge observed in a business-like manner, though with humility and deference.

"Seven years dead," mused Scrooge, "and traveling all the time!"

"The whole time," said the Ghost. "No rest, no peace."

"You travel fast?" said Scrooge.

"On the wings of the wind," replied the Ghost.

"You might have got over a great quantity of ground," said Scrooge.

The Ghost, on hearing this, set up another cry, and clanked its chain hideously in the dead silence of the night.

"Oh! captive, bound and double-ironed," cried the phantom, "not to know, that ages of incessant labor, by immortal creatures, for this earth must pass into eternity before the good of which it is susceptible is all developed."

It held up its chain at arm's length, as if that were the cause of all its unavailing grief, and flung it heavily upon the ground again.

"Hear me!" cried the Ghost. "My time is nearly gone."

"I will," said Scrooge. "But don't be hard upon me, Jacob!"

"How is it that I appear before you in a shape that you can see, I may not tell. I have sat invisible beside you many and many a day."

It was not an agreeable idea. Scrooge shivered, and wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"That is no light part of my penance," pursued the Ghost. "I am here to-night to warn you, that you have yet a chance and hope of escaping my fate. A chance and hope of my procuring, Ebenezer. You will be haunted by three spirits."

"Is that the chance and hope you mentioned, Jacob, Scrooge demanded, in a faltering voice.

"It is."

"I—I think I'd rather not," said Scrooge.

"Without their visits," said the Ghost, "you cannot hope to shun the path I tread. Expect the first to-morrow, when the bell tolls one."

"Couldn't I take 'em all at once, and have it over, Jacob?" hinted Scrooge.

"Expect the second on the next night at the same hour. The third upon the next night when the last stroke of twelve has ceased to vibrate. Look to see me no more. Remember what has passed."

When it had said these words, the spectre took its wrapper from the table, and bound it round its head, as before, and the jaws were brought together with the bandage. In an erect attitude, with its chain wound over and about its arm, the apparition walked backward from Scrooge and at every step it took, the window raised itself a little, so that when the spectre had reached it, it was wide open. It beckoned to Scrooge to approach, which he did. When they were within two paces of each other, Marley's Ghost held up its hand, warning him to come no nearer. Scrooge stopped.

Not so much in obedience, as in surprise and fear; for on the raising of the hand, he became sensible of confused noises in the air; incoherent sounds of lamentations and regrets; wailings inexpressibly sorrowful and self-accusatory. The spectre, after listening for a moment, joined in the mournful dirge, and floated out upon the bleak, dark night.

Scrooge followed to the window; desperate in his curiosity. He looked out.

The air was filled with phantoms, wandering hither and thither in restless haste, and moaning as they went. Every one of them wore chains like Marley's Ghost;

some few were linked together; none were free. Many had been personally known to Scrooge in their lives. He had been quite familiar with one old ghost, in a white waistcoat, with a monstrous iron safe attached to his ankle, who cried piteously at being unable to assist a wretched woman with an infant, whom it saw below, upon a doorstep.

Scrooge closed the window and examined the door by which the Ghost had entered. It was double-locked, as he had locked it with his own hands, and the bolts were undisturbed. He tried to say "Humbug!" but stopped at the first syllable, and went straight to bed, without undressing, and fell asleep upon the instant.

STAVE TWO.

THE FIRST OF THE THREE SPIRITS.

When Scrooge awoke, it was so dark, that looking out of bed, he could scarcely distinguish the transparent window from the opaque walls of his chamber. He was endeavoring to pierce the darkness with his ferret eyes, when the chimes of a neighboring church struck, and he listened for the hour.

To his great astonishment the heavy bell went on from six to seven and from seven to eight, and regularly up to twelve, then stopped. Twelve! It was past two when he went to bed. The clock was wrong. An icicle must have got into the works. Twelve!

He touched the spring of his repeater, to correct this most preposterous clock. Its rapid little pulse beat twelve, and stopped.

"Why, it isn't possible," said Scrooge, "that I can have slept through a whole day and far into another night."

He scrambled out of bed, and groped his way to the

window. He could only make out that it was still very foggy and extremely cold, and that there was no noise of people running to and fro.

Scrooge went to bed again, and thought it over, but could make nothing of it. The more he thought, the more perplexed he was. "Was it a dream or not?"

Scrooge lay in this state until the chimes had gone three quarters more, when he remembered, on a sudden, that the Ghost had warned him of a visitation when the bell tolled one. He resolved to lie awake until the hour was passed.

The quarter was so long, that he was more than once convinced he must have sunk into a doze unconsciously and missed the clock. At length it broke upon his listening ear.

"Ding, dong!"

"A quarter past," said Scrooge, counting.

"Ding, dong!"

"Half-past!" said Scrooge.

"Ding, dong!"

"A quarter to it," said Scrooge.

"Ding, dong!"

"The hour itself," said Scrooge, triumphantly, "and nothing else!"

He spoke before the hour bell sounded, which it now did with a deep, dull hollow, melancholy One. Light flashed up in the room upon the instant, and the curtains of his bed were drawn.

The curtains of his bed were drawn aside, I tell you, by a hand. Scrooge, starting up into a half-recumbent attitude, found himself face to face with the unearthly visitor.

It was a strange figure—like a child; yet not so like a child as like an old man, viewed through some supernatural medium, which gave him the appearance of having receded from the view, and being diminished to a child's proportions. Its hair, which hung about

its neck and down its back, was white as if with age; and yet the face had not a wrinkle, and the tenderest bloom was on the skin. The arms were very long and muscular; the hands the same, as if its hold were of uncommon strength. Its legs and feet, most delicately formed, were, like those upper members, bare. It wore a tunic of the purest white; and round its waist was bound a lustrous belt. It held a branch of fresh green holly in its hand; and its dress was trimmed with summer flowers. But the strangest thing about it was, that from the crown of its head there sprang a bright, clear jet of light, by which all this was visible; and which was doubtless the occasion of its using, in its duller moments, a great extinguisher for a cap, which it now held under its arms. Its belt sparkled and glittered, now in one part and now in another. The figure itself fluctuated in its distinctness, being now a thing with one arm, now with one leg, now with twenty legs, now a pair of legs without a head, now a head without a body; of which dissolving parts, no outline would be visible in the dense gloom wherein they melted away, and then it would be itself again.

"Are you the Spirit, whose coming was foretold to me?"

"I am!" said the apparition.

The voice was soft and gentle as if it were at a distance.

"Who, and what are you?" Scrooge demanded.

"I am the Ghost of Christmas Past."

"Long past?" inquired Scrooge; observant of its dwarfish stature.

"No. Your past."

Scrooge had a special desire to see the Spirit in his cap; and begged him to be covered.

"What!" exclaimed the Ghost, "would you so soon put out the light I give! Is it not enough that you are one of those whose passions made this cap, and force

me through whole trains of years to wear it low upon my brow!"

Scrooge reverently disclaimed all intention to offend and made bold to inquire what business brought him.

"Your welfare!" said the Ghost.

It put out its strong hand as it spoke, and clasped him gently by the arm.

"Rise and walk with me!"

It would have been in vain for Scrooge to plead that the weather and the hour were not adapted to pedestrian purposes. The grasp, though gentle as a woman's hand, was not to be resisted. The Spirit made towards the window and Scrooge clasped its robe in supplication.

"I am mortal," Scrooge remonstrated, "and liable to fall."

"Bear but a touch of my hand there," said the Spirit, laying it upon his heart, "and you shall be upheld in more than this!"

As the words were spoken they passed through the wall, and stood upon an open country road.

"Good Heaven!" said Scrooge, clasping his hands together, as he looked about him. "I was bred in this place. I was a boy here."

The Spirit gazed upon him mildly. Its gentle touch, though it had been light and instantaneous, appeared still present to the old man's sense of feeling. He was conscious of thoughts, and hopes, and joys, and cares long, long forgotten!

"Your lip is trembling," said the Ghost. "And what is that upon your cheek?"

Scrooge muttered, with an unusual catching in his voice, that it was a pimple; and begged the Ghost to lead him where he would.

"You recollect the way?" inquired the Spirit.

"Remember it!" cried Scrooge, with fervor—"I could walk it blindfold."

"Strange to have forgotten it for so many years!" observed the Ghost. "Let us go on."

They walked along the road, Scrooge recognizing every gate, post, and tree, until a little market-town appeared in the distance, with its bridge, its church and winding river. Some shaggy ponies now were seen trotting towards them with boys upon their backs, who called to other boys in country gigs and carts, driven by farmers. All these boys were in great spirits, and shouted to each other, until the broad fields were so full of merry music that the crisp air laughed to hear it.

"These are but shadows of the things that have been," said the Ghost.

The jocund travelers came on; and Scrooge knew and named them every one. Why was he rejoiced beyond all bounds to see them? Why was he filled with gladness when he heard them give each other Merry Christmas, as they parted at cross-roads and bye-ways, for their several homes? What was merry Christmas to Scrooge?

"The school is not quite deserted," said the Ghost. "A solitary child, neglected by his friends, is still there."

Scrooge said he knew it. And he sobbed.

They left the high-road and approached a mansion of dull red brick. It was a large house, but one of broken fortunes, for the spacious offices were little used, their walls were damp and mossy, their windows broken, and their gates decayed. Fowls clucked and strutted in the stables. Entering the dreary house and glancing through the open doors of many rooms, they found them poorly furnished, cold and vast. There was an earthly savor in the air, a chilly bareness in the place.

They went across the hall, to a door at the back of the house. It opened before them, and disclosed a long, bare, melancholy room, made barer still by lines

of plain deal forms and desks. At one of these a lonely boy was reading near a feeble fire; and Scrooge sat down upon a form, and wept to see his poor forgotten self as he had used to be.

The Spirit touched him on the arm, and pointed to his younger self, intent upon his reading. Suddenly a man, in foreign garments—wonderfully real and distinct to look at—stood outside the window, with an axe stuck in his belt, and leading an ass laden with wood by the bridle.

“Why, it’s dear old Ali Baba!” Scrooge exclaimed, in ecstasy.

“Yes, yes, I know! One Christmas time, when yonder solitary child was left here all alone, he did come, for the first time, just like that. Poor boy! and Valentine,” said Scrooge, “and his old brother Orson; there they go! And what’s his name, who was put down in his drawers, asleep, at the Gate of Damascus; don’t you see him! And the sultan’s Groom turned upside down by the Genii; there he is upon his head! Serve him right. I’m glad of it. What business had he to be married to the princess.

“There’s the Parrot!” cried Scrooge. There he is! Poor Robin Crusoe, he called him, when he came home after sailing round the island. The man thought he was dreaming, but he wasn’t. It was the Parrot, you know. There goes Friday, running for his life to the little creek! Hulloo! Hoop! Halloo!”

Then, with a rapidity of transition very foreign to his usual character, he said, in a pity for his former self, “Poor boy!” and cried again.

“I wish,” Scrooge muttered, after drying his eyes with his cuff; “but it’s too late now.”

“What’s the matter?” asked the Spirit.

“Nothing,” said Scrooge. “Nothing. There was a boy singing a Christmas Carol at my door last night. I should like to have given him something—that’s all.”

The Ghost smiled thoughtfully, and waved its hand; saying as it did so, "Let us see another Christmas!"

Scrooge's former self grew larger at the words, and the room became a little darker and more dirty.

He was not reading now, but walking up and down despairingly. Scrooge looked at the Ghost, and with a mournful shaking of his head, glanced anxiously towards the door.

It opened; and a little girl, much younger than the boy, came darting in, and putting her arms about his neck, and often kissing him, addressed him as her "Dear, dear brother."

"I have come to bring you home, dear brother!" said the child, clasping her tiny hands, and bending down to laugh.

"Home, little Fan?" returned the boy.

"Yes," said the child, brimful of glee. "Father is so much kinder than he used to be, that home's like Heaven! He spoke so gently to me one dear night when I was going to bed, that I was not afraid to ask him once more if you might come home; and he said, 'Yes, you should; and sent me in a coach to bring you. And you're to be a man!' said the child, opening her eyes, "and are never to come back here; but first, we're to be together all the Christmas long, and have the merriest time in all the world."

In the hall appeared the schoolmaster himself, who glared on Master Scrooge with a ferocious condescension, and threw him into a dreadful state of mind by shaking hands with him. He then conveyed him and his sister into the veriest old well of a shivering best-parlor that ever was seen, where the maps upon the wall, and the celestial and terrestrial globes in the windows were waxy with cold. Here he produced a decanter of curiously light wine, and a block of curiously heavy cake, and administered instalments of those dainties to the young people. Master Scrooge's

trunk being by this time tied on to the top of the chaise, the children bade the schoolmaster good-bye and drove gaily down the garden-sweep; the quick wheels dashing the hoar-frost and snow from off the dark leaves of the evergreens like spray.

"Always a delicate creature, whom a breath might have withered," said the Ghost. "But she had a large heart!"

"So she had," cried Scrooge. "You're right. I'll not gainsay it, Spirit. God forbid!"

"She died a woman," said the Ghost, "and had, as I think, children."

"One child," Scrooge returned.

"True," said the Ghost. "Your nephew!"

Scrooge seemed uneasy in his mind; and answered briefly, "Yes."

Although they had but that moment left the school behind them, they were now in the busy thoroughfare of a city, where shadowy passengers passed and re-passed. It was made plain enough, by the dressing of the shops, that here too it was Christmas time again; but it was evening, and the streets were lighted up.

The Ghost stopped at a certain warehouse door, and asked Scrooge if he knew it.

"Know it!" said Scrooge. "Was I apprenticed here?"

They went in. At sight of an old gentleman in a Welsh wig, sitting behind such a high desk, that if he had been two inches taller he must have knocked his head against the ceiling, Scrooge cried in great excitement:

"Why, it's old Fezziwig!"

Old Fezziwig laid down his pen and looked up at the clock, which pointed to the hour of seven. He rubbed his hands, and adjusted his waistcoat, and laughed all over himself, and called out in a jovial voice:

"Yo ho, there! Ebenezer! Dick!"

Scrooge's former self, now a grown young man, came briskly in, accompanied by his fellow-'prentice.

"Dick Wilkins, to be sure!" said Scrooge to the Ghost. "Bless me, yes. There he is. He was very much attached to me, was Dick."

"Yo ho, my boys!" said Fezziwig. "No more work tonight. Christmas Eve, Dick. Christmas, Ebenezer! Let's have the shutters up before a man can say Jack Robinson!"

You wouldn't believe how those two fellows went at it! They charged into the street with the shutters and came back before you could think, panting like race-horses.

"Hilli-ho!" cried old Fezziwig, skipping down from the high desk, with wonderful agility. "Clear away, my lads, and let's have lots of room here! Hilli-ho, Dick, Chirrup, Ebenezer!"

The lamps were trimmed, fuel was heaped upon the fire, and the warehouse was as snug, and warm, and dry and bright a ballroom, as you would desire to see upon a winter's night.

In came a fiddler with a music-book, and went up to the lofty desk, and made an orchestra of it, and tuned like fifty stomach-aches. In came Mrs. Fezziwig, one vast substantial smile. In came the three Miss Fezziwigs, beaming and lovable. In came the six young followers whose hearts they broke. In came all the young men and women employed in the business. In they all came, one after another.

Away they all went, twenty couples at once, hands half round and back again the other way; down the middle and up again; round and round in various stages of affectionate grouping; old top couple always turning up in the wrong place; new top couple starting off again, as soon as they got there, all top couple at last, and not a bottom one to help them. When this result was brought, old Fezziwig, clapping his hands

to stop the dance, cried out, "Well done!" and the fiddler plunged his hot face into a pot of porter, especially provided for that purpose.

But the great effect of the evening came when the fiddler struck up "Sir Roger de Coverly." Then old Fezziwig stood out to dance with Mrs. Fezziwig. Top couple too; with a stiff piece of work cut out for them; three or four and twenty pair of partners; people who were not to be trifled with; people who would dance, and had no notion of walking.

When the clock struck eleven, this domestic ball broke up. Mr. and Mrs. Fezziwig took their stations, one on either side the door, and shaking hands with every person individually, as he or she went out, wished him or her a Merry Christmas. When everybody had retired but the two 'prentices, they did the same to them; and thus the cheerful voices died away, and the lads were left to their beds, which were under a counter in the back shop.

During the whole of this time, Scrooge had acted like a man out of his wits. His heart and soul were in the scene, and with his former self. It was not until now, when the bright faces of his former self and Dick were turned from them, that he remembered the Ghost, and became conscious that it was looking full upon him, while the light upon its head burnt very clear.

"A small matter," said the Ghost, "to make these silly folks so full of gratitude."

"Small!" echoed Scrooge.

The Spirit signed to him to listen to the two apprentices, who were pouring out their hearts in praise of Fezziwig—and when he had done so, said:

"Why! Is it not? He has spent but a few pounds of your mortal money. Is that so much that he deserves this praise?"

"It isn't that," said Scrooge, heated by the remark, and speaking unconsciously like his former, not his lat-

ter, self. "It isn't that, Spirit. He has the power to render us happy or unhappy; to make our service light or burdensome; a pleasure or a toil. Say that his power lies in words and looks; in things so slight and insignificant that it is impossible to add and count 'em up—what then? The happiness he gives is quite as great as if it cost a fortune."

He felt the Spirit's glance and stopped.

"What is the matter?" asked the Ghost.

"Nothing particular," said Scrooge.

"Something, I think?" the Ghost insisted.

"No," said Scrooge. "No. I should like to be able to say a word or two to my clerk just now! That's all."

His former self turned down the lamps as he gave utterance to the wish; and Scrooge and the Ghost again stood side by side in the open air.

"My time grows short," observed the Spirit.

This was not addressed to Scrooge, or to any one whom he could see, but it produced an immediate effect. For again Scrooge saw himself. He was older now; a man in the prime of life.

He was not alone, but sat by the side of a fair young girl in a mourning-dress; in whose eyes there were tears, which sparkled in the light that shone out of the Ghost of Christmas Past.

"It matters little," she said, softly. Another idol has displaced me; and if it can cheer and comfort you in time to come, as I have tried to do, I have no just cause to grieve."

"What idol has displaced you?" he rejoined.

"A golden one."

"This is the even-handed dealing of the world!" he said. "There is nothing on which it is so hard as poverty; and there is nothing it professes to condemn with such severity as the pursuit of wealth!"

"You fear the world too much," she answered.



THEN OLD FEZZIWIG STOOD OUT TO DANCE WITH MRS. FEZZIWIG. [PAGE 23.]

"What then?" he retorted. "I am not changed towards you."

She shook her head.

"Am I?"

"Our contract is an old one. It was made when we were both poor and content to be so, until, in good season, we could improve our worldly fortune by our patient industry. When it was made, you were another man."

"I was a boy," he said, impatiently.

"Your own feeling tells you that you were not what you are," she answered. "I am. That which promised happiness when we were one in heart, is fraught with misery now that we are two. It is enough that I have thought of it, and can release you."

"Have I ever sought release?"

"In words. No. Never."

"In what, then?"

"In a changed nature; in an altered spirit; in another atmosphere of life; another Hope as its great end. In everything that made my love of any worth or value in your sight. If this had never been between us," said the girl, looking mildly, but with steadiness, upon him, "tell me, would you seek me out and try to win me now? Ah, no."

He seemed to yield to the justice of this supposition, in spite of himself. But he said with a struggle, "You think not."

"I would gladly think otherwise if I could," she answered.

He was about to speak; but with her head turned from him, she resumed:

"You may have pain in this for a very brief time, and you will dismiss the recollection of it as a dream, from which it happened well that you awoke. May you be happy in the life which you have chosen!"

She left him, and they parted.

"Spirit!" said Scrooge, "show me no more! Conduct me home."

"One shadow more!" exclaimed the Ghost.

"No more!" cried Scrooge. "No more."

But the relentless Ghost pinioned him in both arms, and forced him to observe what happened next.

They were in another scene and place; a room not very large or handsome, but full of comfort. Near to the winter fire a beautiful young girl, so like the last that Scrooge believed it was the same, until he saw her, now a comely matron, sitting opposite her daughter. The noise in this room was perfectly tumultuous, for there were more children in this room than Scrooge in his agitated state of mind could count. The consequences were uproarious beyond belief; but no one seemed to care; on the contrary, the mother and daughter laughed heartily, and enjoyed it very much.

Now a knocking at the door was heard, and such a rush immediately ensued that she with laughing face and plundered dress was borne towards it, the center of a flushed and boisterous group, just in time to greet the father, who came home attended by a man laden with Christmas toys and presents. The shouts of wonder and delight with which the development of every package was received! It is enough that by degrees the children and their emotions got out of the parlor and by one stair at a time, up to the top of the house, where they went to bed, and so subsided.

And now Scrooge looked on more attentively than ever, when the master of the house, having his daughter leaning fondly on him, sat down with her and her mother at his own fireside; and when he thought that such another creature, might have called him father, his sight grew very dim indeed.

"Belle," said the husband, turning to his wife with a smile, "I saw an old friend of yours this afternoon."

"Who was it?"

"It was Mr. Scrooge. I passed his office window; and as it was not shut up, and he had a candle inside, I could scarcely help seeing him. His partner lies upon the point of death, I hear; and there he sat alone. Quite alone in the world, I do believe."

"Spirit!" said Scrooge in a broken voice, "remove me from this place."

"I told you these were shadows of the things that have been," said the Ghost.

"Remove me!" Scrooge exclaimed, "I cannot bear it!"

He turned upon the Ghost, and seeing that it looked upon him with a face, in which in some strange way there were fragments of all the cases it had shown him, wrestled with it. "Leave me!"

Scrooge observed that the Ghosts' light was burning high and bright; and dimly connecting that with its influence over him, he seized the extinguisher-cap and by a sudden action pressed it down upon its head.

The Spirit dropped beneath it, and Scrooge found himself in his own bed.

STAVE THREE.

THE SECOND OF THE THREE SPIRITS.

Awaking in the middle of a snore, and sitting up in bed to get his thoughts together, Scrooge had no occasion to be told that the bell was again upon the stroke of One. He wished to challenge the Spirit on the moment of its appearance and did not wish to be taken by surprise and made nervous.

Now, being prepared for almost anything, he was not by any means prepared for nothing; and, when the Bell struck One, and no shape appeared he was taken with a violent fit of trembling. Five minutes, ten

minutes, a quarter of an hour went by, yet nothing came. All this time, he lay upon his bed, the very core and center of a blaze of ruddy light, which streamed upon it when the clock proclaimed the hour.

He got up softly and shuffled in his slippers to the door.

The moment Scrooge's hand was on the lock, a strange voice called his name and bade him enter.

It was his own room. There was no doubt about that. But it had undergone a surprising transformation. The walls and ceiling were so hung with living green, that it looked a perfect grove, from every part of which, bright, gleaming berries glistened.

"Come in!" exclaimed the Ghost. "Come in! and know me better, man!"

Scrooge entered timidly, and hung his head before the Spirit.

"I am the Ghost of Christmas Past," said the Spirit. "Look at me!"

Scrooge reverently did so. It was clothed in one simple deep green robe, or mantle, bordered with white fur. Its dark brown curls were long and free; free as its genial face, its sparkling eye, its open hand, its cheery voice, its unconstrained demeanor, and its joyful air. Girded round its middle was an antique scabbard; but no sword was in it, and the ancient sheath was eaten up with rust.

"You have never seen the like of me before!" exclaimed the Spirit.

"Never," Scrooge made answer to it.

"Have never walked forth with the younger members of my family; meaning my elder brothers born in these later years?" pursued the Phantom.

"I don't think I have," said Scrooge. "I am afraid I have not."

"Touch my robe!"

Scrooge did as he was told, and held it fast.

The room vanished and they stood in the city streets on Christmas morning. The sky was gloomy, and the shortest streets were choked up with a dingy mist, half-thawed, half-frozen, whose heavier particles descended into a shower of sooty atoms.

The people who were shoveling away the snow on the house-tops were jovial and full of glee; calling out to one another from the parapets, and now and then exchanging a snow-ball.

But soon the steeples called good people all, to church and chapel, and away they came, flocking through the streets in their best clothes, and with their gayest faces. And at the same time there emerged from scores of by-streets, lanes, and nameless turnings, innumerable people, carrying their dinners to the Barker's shop. The sight of these poor revelers appeared to interest the Spirit very much, for she stood with Scrooge beside him in the baker's doorway, and taking off the covers as their bearers passed sprinkled incense on their dinners from his torch. And it was very uncommon kind of torch for once or twice when there were angry words between some dinner-carriers who had jostled with each other, he shed a few drops of water on them from it and their good humor was restored directly. For they said, it was a shame to quarrel upon Christmas Day. And so it was!

Perhaps it was the pleasure the good Spirit has in showing off his power or his sympathy with all poor men, that led him straight to Scrooge's clerk; for there he went, and took Scrooge with him, holding his robe; and on the threshold the Spirit smiled, and stopped to bless Bob Cratchit's dwelling with the sprinklings of his torch. Bob had but fifteen "Bob" a-week himself; and yet the Ghost of Christmas Present blessed his four-roomed house!

Then up rose Mrs. Cratchit Cratchit's wife, dressed out but poorly in a twice-turned gown, but brave in

ribbons, which are cheap and make a goodly show for sixpence; and she laid the cloth, assisted by Belinda.

"Here's Martha, mother!" cried the two young Cratchits. "Hurrah! There's such a goose, Martha!"

"Why, bless your heart, alive, my dear, how late you are!" said Mrs. Cratchit, kissing her a dozen times.

"We'd a deal of work to finish up last night," replied the girl, "And had to clear away this morning, mother!"

"Well! Never mind so long as you are come," said Mrs. Cratchit.

In came little Bob, the father with Tiny Tim upon his shoulder. Alas for Tiny Tim, he bore a little crutch, and had his limbs supported by an iron frame!

At last the dishes were set on, and grace was said. It was succeeded by a breathless pause, as Mrs. Cratchit, looking slowly all along the carving knife, prepared to plunge it in the breast; but when she did, and when the long-expected gush of stuffing issued forth, one murmur of delight arose all round the board, and even Tiny Tim, excited by the two young Cratchits, beat on the table with the handle of his knife, and feebly cried, Hurrah!

There never was such a goose. Its tenderness and flavor, size and cheapness, were the themes of universal admiration. Everyone had had enough and now the plates were changed by Miss Belinda, Mrs. Cratchit left the room alone to take the pudding up and bring it in.

In half a minute Mrs. Cratchit entered—flushed, but smiling proudly—with the pudding like a speckled cannon-ball and bedight with Christmas holly stuck into the top.

At last the dinner was all done, the cloth was cleared and the fire made up. Then all the Cratchit family drew around the hearth, and at Bob Cratchit's elbow stood the family display of glass. Two tumblers, and a custard-cup without a handle.

"A Merry Christmas to us all, my dears. God bless us," proposed Bob, and which all the family re-echoed.

"God bless us every one!" said Tiny Tim, the last of all.

"Spirit," said Scrooge, with an interest he had never felt before, "tell me if Tiny Tim will live."

"I see a vacant seat," replied the Ghost, "in the poor chimney-corner, and a crutch without an owner, carefully preserved. If these shadows remain unaltered by the Future, the child will die."

"No, no," said Scrooge. "Oh, no, kind Spirit! say he will live."

"If these shadows remain unaltered by the Future, none other of my race," returned the Ghost, "will find him here. What then? If he be like to die, he had better do it, and decrease the surplus population."

Scrooge hung his head to hear his own words quoted by the Spirit, and was overcome with penitence.

"Man," said the Ghost, "If man you be in heart, it may be, that in the sight of heaven you are less fit to live than millions like this poor man's child."

Scrooge bent before the Ghost's rebuke, and trembling cast his eyes upon the ground. But he raised them immediately upon hearing his own name.

"Mr. Scrooge!" said Bob; "I'll give you Mr. Scrooge, the Founder of the Feast!"

"The Founder of the Feast indeed!" cried Mrs. Cratchit, reddening. "I wish I had him here. I'd give him a piece of my mind to feast upon, and I hope he'd have a good appetite for it."

"My dear," said Bob, "the children! Christmas day."

"It should be Christmas Day, I am sure," said she, "on which one drinks the health of such an odious, stingy, hard, unfeeling man as Mr. Scrooge. You know he is, Robert!"

"My dear," was Bob's mild answer, "Christmas Day."

"I'll drink his health for your sake and the Day's," said Mrs. Cratchit, "not for his. Long life to him! A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year! He'll be very merry and very happy, I have no doubt!"

After this was past, they were ten times merrier than before, from the mere relief of Scrooge the Baleful being done with.

They were not a handsome family; they were not well dressed; their shoes were far from being waterproof; their clothes were scanty; and Peter might have known, and very likely did, the inside of a pawnbroker's. But they were happy, grateful, pleased with one another, and contented with the time; and when they faded, and looked happier yet in the bright sprinklings of the Spirit's torch at parting, Scrooge had his eye upon them, and especially Tiny Tim, until the last.

By this time it was getting dark, and snowing pretty hard, and as Scrooge and the Spirit went along the streets.

And now, without a word of warning from the Ghost, they stood upon a bleak and desert moor, where monstrous masses of rude stone were cast about, as though it were the burial-place of giants; and water spread itself wheresoever it listed, or would have done so, but for the frost that held it prisoner; and nothing grew but moss and furze, and coarse, rank grass.

"What place is this?" asked Scrooge.

"The place where Miners live, who labor in the bowels of the earth," returned the Spirit. "But they know me."

The Spirit did not tarry here, but bade Scrooge hold his robe, and passing on above the moor, sped whither? Not to sea? To sea. To Scrooge's horror, looking back, he saw the last of land, a frightful range of rocks, behind them; and his ears were deafened by the thundering of water, as it rolled, and roared, and raged



MRS. CRATCHIT ENTERED—FLUSHED, BUT SMILING PROUDLY—
WITH THE PUDDING. [PAGE 30.]

among the dreadful caverns it had worn, and fiercely tried to undermine the earth.

Built upon a dismal reef of sunken rocks, some league or so from shore, on which the waters chafed and dashed, the wild year through, there stood a solitary lighthouse.

But even here, two men who watched the light had made a fire, and through the loophole in the thick stone wall shed out a ray of brightness on the awful sea. Joining their horny hands on the rough table at which they sat, they wished each other Merry Christmas on their can of grog.

Again the Ghost sped on, above the black and heaving sea—on, on—until, being far away, as he told Scrooge, from any shore, they lighted on a ship. They stood beside the helmsman at the wheel, the look-out in the bow, the officers who had the watch; dark, ghostly figures in their several stations; but every man among them hummed a Christmas tune, or had a Christmas thought, or spoke below his breath to his companion of some by-gone Christmas Day, with homeward hopes belonging to it.

It was a great surprise to Scrooge, while listening to the moaning of the wind, and thinking what a solemn thing it was to move on through the lonely darkness over an unknown abyss, whose depths were secrets as profound as Death; it was a great surprise to Scrooge, while thus engaged to hear a hearty laugh. It was a much greater surprise to Scrooge to recognize it as his own nephew's and to find himself in a bright, gleaming room, with the Spirit standing smiling by his side, and looking at the same nephew with approving affability.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Scrooge's nephew. "Ha, ha, ha!" "He said that Christmas was a humbug, as I live!" He believed it, too!"

"More shame for him, Fred!" said Scrooge's niece, indignantly.

She was pretty, altogether she was what you would have called provoking, you know.

"He's a comical old fellow," said Scrooge's nephew, "that's the truth; and not so pleasant as he might be."

"I'm sure he is very rich, Fred," hinted Scrooge's niece. "At least you always tell me so."

"What of that, my dear!" said Scrooge's nephew. "His wealth is of no use to him. He don't do any good with it. He don't make himself comfortable with it."

After tea they had some music and when the strains of music sounded, all the things that Ghost had shown him, came upon his mind; he softened more and more, and thought that if he could have listened to it often years ago, he might have cultivated the kindness of life for his own happiness with his own hands, without resorting to the sexton's spade that buried Jacob Marley.

The whole scene passed off in a breath and he and the Spirit were again upon their travels.

Much they saw and far they went, and many homes they visited, but always with a happy end.

It was a long night, if it were only a night; but Scrooge had his doubts of this, because the Christmas Holidays appeared to be condensed into the space of time they passed together. It was strange, too, that while Scrooge remained unaltered in his outward form, the Ghost grew older, clearly older. Scrooge had observed this change, but never spoke of it, until they left a children's Twelfth Night party, when, looking at the Spirit as they stood together in an open place, he noticed that its hair was gray.

"Are Spirits' lives so short?" asked Scrooge.

"My life upon this globe is very brief," replied the Ghost. "It ends to-night." "To-night at midnight." The time is drawing near.

The chimes were ringing the three quarters past eleven at that moment.

"Forgive me if I am not justified in what I ask," said Scrooge, looking intently at the Spirit's robe, "but I see something strange, and not belonging to yourself, protruding from your skirts. Is it a foot or a claw?"

"It might be a claw, for the flesh there is upon it," was the Spirit's sorrowful answer. "Look here."

From the foldings of its robe, it brought two children; wretched, frightful, hideous, miserable. They knelt down at its feet, and clung upon the outside of its garment.

"Oh! Man look here!" exclaimed the Ghost.

Scrooge started back, appalled. Having them shown to him in this way, he tried to say they were fine children, but the words choked themselves rather than be parties to a lie of such enormous magnitude.

"Spirit! are they yours?" Scrooge could say no more.

"They are Man's," said the Spirit, looking down upon them. "And they cling to me, appealing from their fathers. This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both, and all of their degree, but most of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that written which is Doom, unless the writing be erased. Deny it!" cried the Spirit, stretching out its hand towards the city. "Slander those who tell it ye! Admit it for your factious purposes, and make it worse! And hide the end!"

"Have they no refuge or resource?" cried Scrooge.

"Are there no prisons?" said the Spirit, turning on him for the last time with his own words. "Are there no workhouses?"

The bell struck twelve.

Scrooge looked about him for the Ghost, and saw it not. As the last stroke ceased to vibrate, he remembered the prediction of old Jacob Marley, and lifting up his eyes, beheld a solemn Phantom, draped and hooded, coming, like a mist along the ground, towards him.

STAVE FOUR.

THE LAST OF THE SPIRITS.

The Phantom slowly, gravely, silently, approached. It was shrouded in a deep black garment, which concealed its head, its form, and left nothing of it visible save one outstretched hand.

"I am in the presence of the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come?" said Scrooge.

The Spirit answered not, but pointed downward with its hand.

"You are about to show me shadows of the things that have not happened, but will happen in the time before us," Scrooge pursued. "Is that so, Spirit?"

The upper portion of the garment was contracted for an instant in its folds, as if the Spirit had inclined its head. That was the only answer he received.

"Ghost of the Future!" he exclaimed, "I fear you more than any Spectre I have seen. But, as I know your purpose is to do me good, and as I hope to live to be another man from what I was, I am prepared to bear you company, and do it with a thankful heart. Will you not speak to me?"

It gave no reply. The hand was pointed straight before them.

"Lead on!" said Scrooge. "Lead on!"

The Phantom moved away as it had come towards him. Scrooge followed in the shadow of its dress.

They scarcely seemed to enter the city; for the city rather seemed to spring up about them, and encompass them of its own act. But they were there, in the heart of it; on 'Change, amongst the merchants; who hurried up and down, and chinked the money in their pockets, and conversed in groups, and looked at their

watches, and trifled thoughtfully with their gold seals as Scrooge had seen them often.

The Spirit stopped beside one little knot of business men. Observing that the hand was pointed to them, Scrooge advances to listen to their talk.

"No," said a great fat man with a monstrous chin, "I don't know much about it, either way. I only know he's dead."

"When did he die?" inquired another.

"Last night, I believe."

"Why what was the matter with him?" asked a third, taking a vast quantity of snuff out of a very large snuff-box. "I thought he'd never die."

"God knows," said the first with a yawn.

"What has he done with his money?" asked a red-faced gentleman.

"I haven't heard," said the man with the large chin.

"It's likely to be a very cheap funeral," said the same speaker, "for upon my life I don't know of anybody to go to it."

The Phantom glided on into a street. Its finger pointed to two persons meeting. Scrooge listened again. He knew these men perfectly. They were men of business of great importance.

"How are you," said one.

"How are you?" returned the other.

"Well," said the first. "Old Scratch has got his own at last, hey?"

"So I am told," returned the first.

Not another word. That was their meeting, their conversation, and their parting.

Quiet and dark, beside him stood the Phantom, with its outstretched hand. When he roused himself from his thoughtful quest, he fancied from the turn of the hand, and its situation in reference to himself, that the Unseen Eyes were looking at him keenly. It made him shudder, and feel very cold.

They left the busy scene, and went into an obscure part of the town, where Scrooge had never penetrated before. The ways were foul and narrow; the shops and houses wretched; the people half-naked, slip-shod, ugly. The whole quarter reeked with crime, with filth, and misery.

Far into this den of infamous resort, there was a low-browed beetling shop; below a penthouse roof, where iron, old rags, bottles, bones and greasy oil, were bought. Upon the floor within, were piled up heaps of rusty keys, nails, chains, hinges, files, scales, weights, and refuse iron of all kinds. Sitting in among the wares was a grey-haired rascal, who had screened himself from the cold air without, and smoked his pipe in all the luxury of calm retirement.

Scrooge and the Phantom came into the presence of this man just as a woman with a heavy bundle slunk into the shop. She had but entered when in came another woman, similarly laden, and she was closely followed by a man in faded black, and they all seemed startled to see each other. After a short period of blank astonishment, in which the old man with the pipe had joined them, they all three burst into a laugh!

"Come into the parlor," said he.

The parlor was the space behind the screen of rags.

"What odds, then," What odds, Mrs. Dilber?" said one of the women, "Every person has a right to take care of themselves. He always did!"

"That's true, indeed!" said the laundress. "No man more so."

"Why, then, don't stand staring as if you was afraid, woman; who's the wiser?"

"If he wanted to keep 'em after he was dead, a wicked old screw," pursued the woman, "why wasn't he natural in his lifetime?"

"It's the truest word that ever was spoke," said Mrs. Dilber.

"I wish it was a little heaver one," replied the woman. Open that bundle old Joe, and let me know the value of it.

A seal or two, a pencil-case, a pair of sleeve buttons, and a brooch of no great value were all. They were severally examined and appraised by old Joe, who chalked the sums he was disposed to give for each upon the wall.

"What do you call this?" said Joe. "Bed-curtains!"

"That's what," replied the woman.

"You don't mean to say you took them with him lying there?" said Joe.

"Yes I do," replied the woman.

"I hope he didn't die of anything catching? Eh?" said old Joe.

Scrooge listened to this dialogue in horror.

"Ha, ha," laughed the same woman, as Joe produced a flannel bag with money in it and told out their several gains upon the ground.

"Spirit," said Scrooge, shuddering from head to foot. "I see, I see. The case of this unhappy man might be my own. Merciful Heaven, what is this?"

He recoiled in terror, for the scene had changed, and now he almost touched a bed; a bare, uncurtained bed; on which, beneath a ragged sheet, there lay something covered up, which, though it was dumb, announced itself in awful language.

Scrooge glanced towards the Phantom. Its steady hand was pointed to the head. The cover was so carelessly adjusted that the slightest raising of it, the motion of a finger upon Scrooge's part, would have disclosed the face. He thought of it, felt how easy it would be to do, and longed to do it; but had no more power to withdraw the veil than to dismiss the spectre at his side.

He thought, if this man could be raised up now, what would be his foremost thoughts? Avarice, hard

dealing, gripping cares? They have brought him to a rich end, truly!

"Spirit!" he said, "this is a fearful place. In leaving it, I shall not leave its lesson, trust me."

The Phantom spread its dark robe before him for a moment, like a wing; and withdrawing it, revealed a room by daylight, where a mother and her children were.

At length the long-expected knock was heard. She hurried to the door and met her husband.

He sat down to the dinner that had been hoarding for him by the fire; and when she asked him faintly what news, he appeared embarrassed how to answer.

"Is it good," she said, "or bad?" to help him.

"Bad," he answered.

"We are quite ruined?"

"No. There is hope yet, Caroline."

"If he relents," she said, amazed, "there is! Nothing is past hope, if such a miracle has happened."

"He is past relenting; he is dead."

She was a mild and patient creature if her face spoke truth; but she was thankful in her soul to hear it, and she said so, with clasped hands. She prayed forgiveness the next moment.

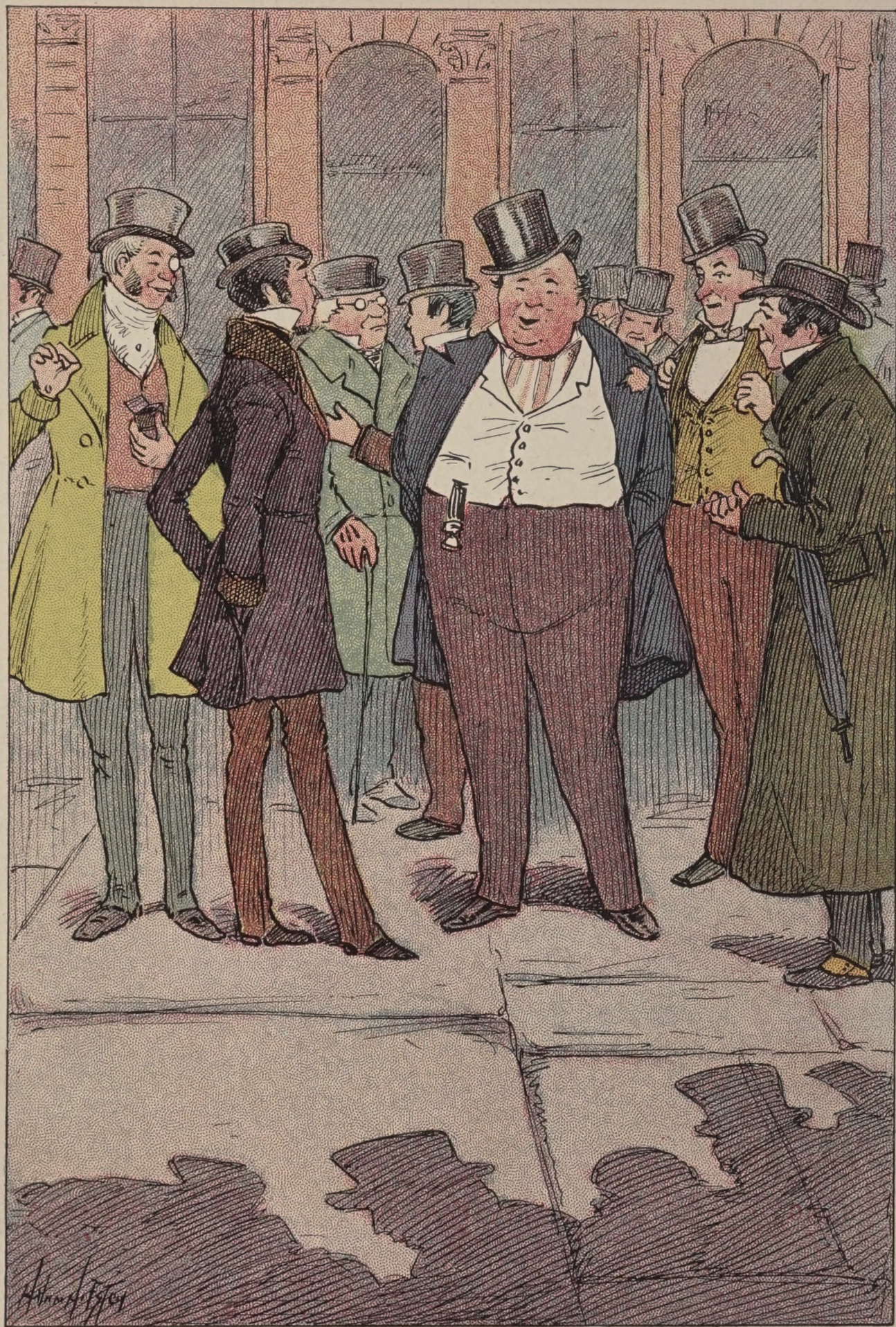
"What the half-drunken woman whom I told you of last night said to me, when I tried to see him and obtain a week's delay; and what I thought was a mere excuse to avoid me, turns out to have been quite true. He was not only quite ill, but dying then."

"To whom will our debt be transferred?"

"I don't know. But before that time we shall be ready with the money."

"Let me see some tenderness connected with a death," said Scrooge; "or that dark chamber, Spirit, which we left just now, will be forever present to me."

The Ghost conducted him through several streets familiar to his feet; and as they went along, Scrooge



THE SPIRIT STOPPED BESIDE ONE LITTLE KNOT OF BUSINESS MEN.
[PAGE 37.]

looked here and there to find himself, but nowhere was he to be seen. They entered poor Bob Cratchit's house; the dwelling he had visited before; and found the mother and children seated around the fire.

The mother laid her work upon the table, and put her hand up to her face.

"The color hurts my eyes," she said.

The color? Ah, poor Tiny Tim!

"There is your father at the door," said she.

She hurried out to meet him; his tea was ready for him on the hob, and they all tried who could help him to it most.

Bob was very cheerful with them all, and spoke pleasantly to all the family. He looked at the work upon the table, and praised the industry and speed of Mrs. Cratchit and the girls. They would be done long before Sunday, he said.

"Yes, my dear," returned Bob. "I wish you could have gone. It would have done you good to see how green the place is. But you'll see it often. My little, little child!" cried Bob. "My little child!"

He broke down all at once. He couldn't help it. He left the room, and went upstairs into the room above. Poor Bob sat down beside the little child and kissed its little face, and then went down again, quite happy.

Mrs. Cratchit kissed him, his daughters kissed him, the two young Cratchits kissed him. Spirit of Tiny Tim, the childish essence was from God!

"Spectre," said Scrooge, "something informs me that our parting moment is at hand. I know it, but I know not how. Tell me what man that was who we saw lying dead."

The Spirit went straight on, until besought by Scrooge to tarry for a moment.

"This court," said Scrooge, "through which we hurry now, is where my place of occupation is, and has

been for a length of time. I see the house. Let me behold what I shall be, in days to come!"

Scrooge hastened to the window of his office, and looked in. It was an office still, but not his. The furniture was not the same, and the figure in the chair was not himself. The Phantom pointed as before.

He joined it it once again, and wondering why and whither he had gone, accompanied it until they reached an iron gate. He paused to look round before entering.

A churchyard. Here, then, the wretched man whose name he had now to learn, lay underneath the ground.

The Spirit stood among the graves, and pointed down to One.

"Before I draw nearer to that stone to which you point," said Scrooge, "answer me one question. Are these the shadows of the things that Will be, or the shadows of things that May be, only?"

Still the Ghost pointed downward to the grave by which it stood.

"Men's courses will foreshadow certain ends, to which, if persevered in, they must lead," said Scrooge. "But if the courses be departed from, the ends will change. Say it is thus with what you show me!"

The Spirit was as immovable as ever.

Scrooge crept towards it, trembling as he went, and following the finger, read upon the stone of the neglected grave his own name, Ebenezer Scrooge.

"Am I that man who lay upon the bed?" he cried, upon his knees.

The finger pointed from the grave to him, and back again.

"Good Spirit," he pursued, as down upon the ground he fell before it; "Your nature intercedes for me, and pities me. Assure me that I yet may change these shadows you have shown me, by an altered life!"

The kind hand trembled.

In his agony, he caught the spectral hand. It sought to free itself, but he was strong in his entreaty, and detained it. The Spirit, stronger yet, repulsed him.

Holding up his hands in one last prayer he saw the Phantom shrink, collapse, and dwindle into a bed-post.

STAVE FIVE.

Yes! and the bed-post was his own. The bed was his own, the room was his own. Best and happiest of all, Time was his own, to make amends in!

"I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future!" Scrooge repeated, as he scrambled out of bed. "The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. Oh, Jacob Marley! Heaven, and the Christmas Time be praised for this! I say it on my knees, old Jacob Marley, on my knees!"

"They are not torn down," cried Scrooge, folding one of his bed-curtains in his arms, "they are not torn down, rings and all. They are here; the shadows of the things that would have been, may be dispelled."

"I don't know what to do!" cried Scrooge, laughing and crying in the same breath; and making a perfect Laocoon of himself with his stockings. "I am as light as a feather, I am as happy as an angel, I am as merry as a school-boy. A merry Christmas to everybody! Hallo here! Whoop! Hallo!"

He had frisked into the sitting-room, and was now standing there; perfectly winded.

"There's the saucepan that the gruel was in!" cried Scrooge, starting off again, and frisking round the fire-place. "There's the door, by which the Ghost of Jacob Marley entered! There's the window where I saw the

wandering Spirits! It's all right, it's all true, it all happened! Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't know what day of the month it is!" said Scrooge. "I don't know how long I've been among the Spirits. I don't know anything. I'm quite a baby. Never mind. I don't care. I'd rather be a baby. Hallo! Whoop! Hallo here!"

"What's to-day?" cried Scrooge, calling downward to a boy in Sunday clothes.

"To-day!" replied the boy. "Why, Christmas Day!"

"It's Christmas Day!" said Scrooge to himself. "I haven't missed it. The Spirits have done it all in one night. Hallo, my fine fellow!"

"Hallo!" returned the boy.

"Do you know whether they've sold the prize Turkey that was at the Poulterer's, in the next street but one?"

"What, the one big as me?" returned the boy.

"Yes, my buck," said Scrooge.

"It's hanging there now," replied the boy.

"Go and buy it," said Scrooge, "and tell them to bring it here, that I may give them directions where to take it. Come back with the man in less than five minutes and I will give you half-a-crown!"

"I'll send it to Bob Cratchit!" whispered Scrooge, splitting with a laugh. "He shan't know who sends it. It's twice the size of Tiny Tim."

The hand in which he wrote the address was not a steady one, but write it he did and went down stairs to open the street door. As he stood there, waiting the poulterer's arrival, the knocker caught his eye.

"I shall love it, as long as I live!" cried Scrooge, patting it with his hand. "I scarcely ever looked at it before. What an honest expression it has on its face! It's a wonderful knocker! Here's the turkey. Hallo! Whoop! How are you! Merry Christmas!"

"Why, it's impossible to carry that to Camdem Town," said Scrooge. "You must have a cab."

He dressed himself "all in his best," and at last got out into the streets. The people were by this time pouring forth, as he had seen them with the Ghost of Christmas Present; and walking with his hands behind him, Scrooge regarded every one with a delightful smile. He looked so irresistibly pleasant, in a word, that three or four good-humored fellows said, "Good morning, Sir! A Merry Christmas to you!" And Scrooge said afterwards, that of all the blithe sounds he had ever heard, those were the blithest in his ears.

He had not gone far, when coming on towards him he beheld the portly gentleman, who had walked into his counting-house the day before and said, "Scrooge and Marley's, I believe?" It sent a pang across his heart to think how this old gentleman would look upon him when they met; but he knew what path lay straight before him, and he took it.

"My dear Sir," said Scrooge. "That is my name, and I fear it may not be pleasant to you. Allow me to ask your pardon. And will you have the goodness—" here Scrooge whispered in his ear.

"Lord bless me!" cried the gentleman, as if his breath were gone. "My dear Mr. Scrooge, are you serious?"

"If you please," said Scrooge. "Not a farthing less."

"My dear Sir," said the other, shaking hands with him. "I don't know what to say to such munifi—"

"Thank'ee," said Scrooge. "I am much obliged to you. Bless you!"

In the afternoon, he turned his steps towards his nephew's house.

He passed the door a dozen times, before he had the courage to go up and knock. But he made a dash and did it.

"Is your master at home, my dear?" said Scrooge to the girl.

"Yes, sir, He's in the dining-room, Sir, along with the mistress. I'll show you upstairs, if you please."

"Thank'ee. He knows me," said Scrooge, with his hand already on the dining-room lock. "I'll go in here, my dear."

He turned in gently, and sidled his face in, round the door. They were looking at the table for these young housekeepers are always nervous on such points, and like to see that everything is all right.

"Fred!" said Scrooge.

"Why, bless my soul!" cried Fred, "who's that?"

"It's I. Your Uncle Scrooge. I have come to dinner. Will you let me in, Fred?"

"Let him in! It is a mercy he didn't shake his arm off." He was at home in five minutes. Nothing could be heartier.

He was early at the office next morning.

Oh he was early there. If he could only be there first, and catch Bob Cratchit coming late! That was the thing he had set his heart upon. And he did it; yes, he did it! The clock struck nine. No Bob. A quarter past. No Bob. He was full eighteen minutes and a half behind his time. Scrooge sat with his door wide open, that he might see him come into the Tank.

His hat was off, before he opened the door; his comforter, too. He was on his stool in a jiffy; driving away with his pen, as if he were trying to overtake nine o'clock.

"Hallo!" growled Scrooge, in his accustomed voice as near as he could feign it. "What do you mean by coming here at this time of day?"

"I am very sorry, Sir," said Bob. "I am behind my time."

"You are?" repeated Scrooge. "Yes, I think you are. Step this way, Sir, if you please."

"It's only once a year," pleaded Bob, appearing from the Tank. "It shall not be repeated. I was making rather merry yesterday, Sir."

"Now, I'll tell you what, my friend," said Scrooge, "I am not going to stand this sort of thing any longer. And therefore," he continued, leaping from his stool, and giving Bob such a dig in the waistcoat that he staggered back into the Tank again; "and therefore I I am about to raise your salary!"

Bob trembled, and got a little nearer to the ruler. He had a momentary idea of knocking Scrooge down with it; holding him; and calling to the people in the court for help and a strait-waistcoat.

"A Merry Christmas, Bob!" cried Scrooge, with an earnestness that could not be mistaken, as he clapped him on the back. "Merrier Christmas Bob, my good fellow, than I have given you for many a year. I'll raise your salary, and endeavor to assist your struggling family, and we'll discuss your affairs this very afternoon, over a Christmas bowl of smoking bishop, Bob! Make up the fires, and buy another coal-scuttle before you dot another i, Bob Cratchit."

Scrooge was better than his word. He did it all, and infinitely more; and to Tiny Tim, who did not die, he was a second father. He became as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man, as the good old city knew, or any other good old city, town, or borough, in the good old world. Some people laughed to see the alteration in him, but he let them laugh, and little heeded them, for he was wise enough to know that nothing ever happened on this globe, for good, at which some people did not have their fill of laughter in the outset; and knowing that such as these would be blind anyway, he thought it quite as well that they should wrinkle up their eyes in grins, as have the malady in less attractive forms. His own heart laughed; and that was quite enough for him.

He had no further intercourse with Spirits, but lived upon the Total Abstinence Principle, ever afterwards; and it was always said of him, that he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge. May that be truly said of us, and all of us!" And so, as Tiny Tim observed, God Bless us, Every One!

THE END.

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